

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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P 150757Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3197

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1374

EXDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS:

USIA/INA FOR AUSTIN

USIA/NESA FOR NOOTER

NEA/ARN FOR AMBASSADOR MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OEXC, PFOR, SY, US

SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM'S OPPOSITION TO CU - IV PROGRAM

1. SUMMARY: FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL HAS INFORMED
EMBASSY (UNOFFICIALLY) THAT FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM
HAS RECOMMENDED TO PRIME MINISTER THAT SARG TURN DOWN
FOUR CU - IV INVITATIONS FOR SYRIAN OFFICIALS TO VISIT
U.S. END SUMMARY.

2. ON APRIL 14 PAO RECEIVED INDIRECT MESSAGE FROM
FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS HAMOUD
SHOUFI THAT HE SHOULD "INVENT" REASON TO PAY CALL ASAP.
SHOUFI OPENED HALF HOUR FORENOON VISIT BY SAYING HE
HAD SEEN COPY OF EMBASSY NOTE EXTENDING FOUR INVITATIONS
FOR CU - INTERNATIONAL VISITOR PROGRAM. HE SAID HE
HAD BEEN ABLE TO ASCERTAIN THAT ONE OF INVITEES
WAS TO BE HIMSELF, SO HE HAD PERSONAL AS WELL AS
PROFESSIONAL INTEREST IN SYRIAN RESPONSE TO THESE
INVITATIONS.

3. SHOUFI SAID FONMIN KHADDAM HAD TAKEN THE NOTE

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DIRECTLY TO PRIME MINISTER AYYOUBI, STRONGLY

RECOMMENDING THAT THE INVITATIONS BE TURNED DOWN.
HE DID NOT KNOW WHY FONMIN WANTED TO RADECT INVITATIONS,
BUT BELIEVED MATTER WAS TAKEN TO PRIME MINISTER
INSTEAD OF BEING KILLED OUTRIGHT BY KHADDAM BECAUSE
HE ASSUMED EMBASSY HAD SENT COPIES OF NOTE TO OTHER
MINISTRIES FROM WHICH NOMINEES DRAWN. (TRUE. THIS
IS CUSTOMARY PRACTICE.)

4. SHOIFI STRESSED THAT HIS PERSONAL DESIRE TO VISIT
U.S. WAS SECONDARY TO POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS WHICH WOULD
ARISE IF SARG SUMMARILY REJECTED THIS GESTURE. HE
POINTED OUT: "WE ACCEPT INVITATIONS EVERY WEEK
FROM ROUMANIA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, BULGARIA, ETC. IF
WE SIMPLY TURN DOWN THIS INVITATION WE WOULD BE
MAKING A COMMENTARY ON THE STATE OF SYRIAN-AMERICAN
RELATIONS THAT WOULD NOT REFLECT THE TRUTH."

5. SHOIFI WENT ON TO SAY THAT PRESIDENT ASAD, WHOM
HE CHARACTERIZED AS ONLY MEMBER OF GOVERNMENT
GENUINELY INTERESTED IN BETTER SYRIAN-U.S. RELATIONS,
WAS NOT AWARE OF SITUATION, WHICH HAD BEEN BROUGHT
ABOUT BY FONMIN'S PERSONAL ACTION. HE THEN NOTED
THAT WHEN AMBASSADOR MURPHY RETURNED TO SYRIA HE
WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE REASON TO CALL ON PRESIDENT.
THIS WOULD BE OPPORTUNITY, HE SAID, FOR AMBASSADOR
TO BRING MATTER TO PRESIDENT'S ATTENTION, POSSIBLY
SALVAGING PROGRAM.

6. COMMENT: (A) IT SEEMS CLEAR FROM FOREGOING THAT
FONMIN HAS TAKEN THIS DECISION HIMSELF, ON HIS OWN
INITIATIVE AND NOT ON THE RECOMMENDATION OF OTHERS.
HIS PRECIPITANT ACTION HERE IS REMINISCENT OF THE
WAY HE MOVED TO REJECT OUR OFFER OF ONE HUNDRED AID-
FINANCED SCHOLARSHIPS LAST FEBRUARY. IT ALSO SEEMS
CLEAR THAT SHOIFI HAS ACTED ON HIS OWN, WITHOUT
KNOWLEDGE OR APPROVAL OF THE MINISTRY, IN INFORMING US.

(B) THE PRIME MINISTER HAS APPARENTLY NOT TAKEN A
DECISION ON THE MATTER AS YET AND PROBABLY WILL DO
NOTHING UNTIL THE BAATH PARTY CONGRESS WINDS UP AND
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HE IS CONFIRMED IN HIS POSITION. HE WAS NOT RE-ELECTED
TO REGIONAL BAATH COMMAND, AND RUMORS ARE STRONG THAT
A NEW PRIME MINISTER WILL BE APPOINTED SHORTLE.

(C) OTHER PROSPECTIVE IV CANDIDATES ARE CONFIDENT
OF APPROVAL FROM THEIR RESPECTIVE MINISTERS (ONE SAYS
HE HAS ALREADY OBTAINED IT) AND AWAIT ONLY OFFICIAL
NOTIFICATION AND BLESSING FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY.

NEITHER THEY NOR THEIR MINISTRIES ARE APPARENTLY YET
AWARE OF KHADDAM'S ACTION.

(D) WE ARE SUBMITTING BY SEPARATE CABLE OUR NOMI-
NATIONS FOR THESE FOUR IV GRANTS, RECOGNIZING FIRST
THAT APPROVAL MAY BE DELAYED OR NOT FORTHCOMING AT ALL
AND SECOND, THAT IN EVENT OF APPROVAL OF INVITATIONS
FOREIGN MINISTRY AT LEAST IS LIKELY TO STALL AND
PERHAPS NOMINATE SOMEONE OTHER THAN SHOUFI. IN CIRCUMSTANCES
WE ALSO DO NOT SEE WHAT ACTION WE CAN PROFITABLY TAKE
ON THIS MATTER VIS-A-VIS SYRIAN GOVERNMENT UNTIL
AMBASSADOR'S RETURN. WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S
GUIDANCE.
PELLETREAU

NOTE BY OCT: NOT PASSED USIA NOR NEA.

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